

SANITARY COMMISSION.

No. 50.

WHAT THEY HAVE TO DO WHO STAY AT HOME.

The war has just been recast. There was recently a period in which the people stood, in a measure, dismayed by the failures of the summer campaign, the call for a new army, the first assessment of the war-tax, and the resurging tide of the old army, sweeping up the Ohio and the Potomac, sending its wounded before it and leaving its dead behind. There was a moment of reconsideration, if not of hesitation. The cost of war had not been fairly counted—the horror of war had not been fairly seen. It had been entered upon in excitement, almost with a pleasurable fervor. Now, in a moment of disappointment, depression, and mourning, the full cost was pondered, the full horror looked in the face. Not sullenly—not in passion. Never was there less of rancor in a war; there is no fear here of extermination nor of subjugation; there is no phrensy. If there ever was a vein of that sort, it ran out on the Chickahominy.

Yet, we are at this moment re-entering upon the war with a patient zeal of preparation much more indicative of resolution than the enthusiastic tumult with which we first moved in it. Are we ruled in this by a mere delusion of patriotism, or by deep common sense and the generous instincts of a true heroism?

Generous instincts which look toward and co-operate with great existing principles, declare forever that in Union is strength—strength not of communities alone, but of every man to best carry out the requirements of his nature and his God.

Sound common sense declares the wastefulness of disunited policies where permanent interests are so inseparably united as must be those of all men who after us are to occupy this land together.

For the sake of mankind on this continent we must not have the experience of Europe repeated here; we must go on and on, and ever on, with this one war, until such an end is reached as will save constant recurrence of wars; we must make any necessary sacrifices to firmly and finally establish here the policy of co-operation and brotherly unity, against the policies which from time to time will arise through the impatient ambition, the instability or perversity of this or that part of the people of the land.

A conviction of the grand economy of the Union and of the necessity of sacrificing local, personal, and transitory interests to the policy of the Union, being thus our highest justification in pursuing the terrible path of war, the same conviction should possess and control us in all we have to do about the war. Most evidently it should do so in all movements of the people to send aid and comfort from their homes to those who have left homes and comforts to face the common enemy.

At the outset of the war a body of men was commissioned by the President of the United States for purposes of inquiry and advice with regard to the sanitary interests of the forces to be employed in it. A precedent for this course had been established by the British Government in the Crimean war, by which it was known that thousands of lives were saved. This body is still pursuing the purposes for which it was originally consti-

tuted ; and for which it was necessary that it should maintain direct confidential observation through responsible and expert agents of every portion of the field, the hospitals, and the transports.

Observing a sad waste of the voluntary supplies intended for the sick of the army, it was early suggested that the advantages of the organization which it had thus to establish, should be made also available for the better direction and ministration of these supplies. In the determination of arrangements for this purpose, no part of the duty undertaken had more anxious consideration than that of guarding against the careless, willful, or ignorant perversion of the one sacred intention of those who made these offerings—the relief of the sick and the wounded. The measures adopted for this purpose cannot be discussed publicly with advantage. The honorable names of the men composing the Commission are the public's best pledges that these measures are as perfect as, in their judgment, they can be made. It is impossible to have an efficient system of supply without risk of some waste. The Commission vigilantly watches the goods placed in its care until they reach the soldier needing them. Having done so, it has no right and no power to say that they shall not be sold or thrown away by the soldier when he no longer needs them. This is the foundation, and the only foundation of many reports which are wickedly circulated to the discouragement of those whose hearts are in this work. The fact that a certain amount of waste is inevitable should no more be allowed to lessen their generosity than should apprehension that the crows will pull up a portion of his corn, induce a farmer to lessen the amount of seed to be planted.

To meet the new duty assumed by the Commission, extensive arrangements for the collection, assortment, and conveyance of goods were made, and at suitable points near the army in the field, stations of distribution were established, in

charge of capable agents. When necessary, independent means of transportation had also to be secured. All this having been done, necessarily at a large cost, the only point which remains to be secured is, that the people should avail themselves of the advantages it offers. It is perfectly certain that supplies sent through this channel will have greater value, on an average, than they can have, sent in any other way, and that in proportion as the people unite to make use of this channel, the greater will be the value of each individual article sent through it.

There is no time, when relief has a tithe of the value that it has when presented immediately after a battle. In the recent campaign in Maryland, the agents of the Commission, more than once, were distributing from its stores to the wounded on the field, while engagements were yet in progress; and within three days after the battle of Antietam, more than forty of its chosen agents were on the ground, systematically employed in the same duty; and succor, in one form or another, had been extended by them to *eight thousand* sufferers. Among the materials distributed, there were some of the first importance, and of which there was at this time scarcely any supply on the ground except that brought through the Commission, such as morphine and chloroform. Within a week ten thousand shirts and drawers, five hundred bottles of stimulants, two thousand sponges, several tons of soup, and other nice articles of nutriment; many barrels of lint and bandages, and a large quantity of assorted articles, expressly adapted to the purpose, had been taken from the reserved stores of the Commission, and delivered in person by its selected agents at the hospitals in which the wounded had been collected. All practicable pains were taken to prevent this distribution from being made indiscriminately, unfairly, or wastefully. Six professional inspectors were employed in visiting the hospitals and in directing relief

where the demand was most pressing ; and when supplies were not administered to the wounded directly by the agents of the Commission, a surgeon or other officer was made responsible under his own signature for their delivery to those who needed them.

It may be said with confidence, that all the goods which the Commission were able to bring upon this battle-field were thus made, in their life-saving power, a hundred fold more valuable than they would have been if they had been thrown into other channels, and delivered with only the usual advantages of those who operate independently of the Commission.

The Commission has been censured for attempting to accumulate supplies, and for holding them in reserve at a distance from the seat of war, and gifts have been withheld from it on this account, and sent to those who were eager to bestow them with thoughtless liberality wherever a soldier could be found disabled for a time from duty. Nothing can be more certain than that had all taken this course, the lives of hundreds of brave men, each dear to some fireside, would have been lost at Antietam, which have now been saved. This will not be regarded as an extravagant statement when it is known that there were thirty regiments of one State alone, which went into this battle absolutely without the smallest particle of medical or surgical stores in the hands of their surgeons ; that the Government supplies sent out for their relief did not reach the ground till the third day after the battle, and that one of the largest of the field hospitals was provided by the Commission, not only with subsistence stores, bedding, clothing, and medicine, but for several days with the only medical attendance which the patients in it received.

Let the full meaning of this be felt, and let it be remembered that, in what was done here, every contributor to the treasury or the stores of the Commission had part, as much as if the aid

thus given had been tendered in person to the sufferers on the field; perhaps even more so, for, placed in the hands of men instructed and trained how best to use it, each gift received a value which it might not have had in the hands of the contributor. It will be seen, then, that in proportion as the principle of Union is adhered to, in the bestowment of these gifts, their value is increased, and that in every departure from this principle there is a waste of that which may otherwise be to the saving of life.

The impulse may be a natural one which seeks to know even the individual person upon whom our gifts are bestowed, and to give them by the hands of some friend or neighbor; but it must be obvious that it is, to say the least, a higher form of benevolence and of patriotism which asks only to have a reasonable assurance that the soldiers of the Union will be helped by our offerings, when and where they most need our help, and that it is only by the exercise of this larger benevolence that measures of relief can be taken at all adequate to the necessities of the army, or commensurate with the grandeur of its purposes.

It is unquestionably true, also, that under a system of State distribution some of the soldiers in the hospitals, which would come under the convenient reach of this shortened arm, might receive more comforts and luxuries than they would if they shared with others in an equal distribution of the supplies turned in from all loyal States to a common channel. But what real patriot can wish or be willing, even, to have soldiers from his State, or from his town, or his kindred, enjoying extra comforts and luxuries, while wounded men by their side, or on the distant battle-field, are, perhaps, in actual stress of life for want of the very supplies which a better distribution would secure to them?

In order to carry out this more generous and efficient method, hospital supplies *must* be accumulated at certain points where they can be instantly commanded, and from which they can be transferred in large and assorted quantities wherever the most urgent calls are made for them. For this purpose, most persons should become simply contributors to societies, which have the duty to send forward what they collect to such convenient points, for assortment, storage, and transshipment, as may be established by the Commission. Societies for this purpose should exist in every town, village, and neighborhood, and should be sustained with steady zeal, as a duty of no light importance. All such societies are really to be considered as societies for the propagation of the true faith of the Union. For to say that the people of the loyal States, or of any of them, move with one mind, or that there is among them a universal spirit of self-sacrificing devotion to the cause of their country, is to use a figure of speech, which never could apply literally to any people, least of all to a civilized people under institutions favorable to individuality of character. Some are slow, some are quick, to see the magnitude and imminence of the common duty. Some are too much absorbed in special interests, some are still under the influence of former misinformation, and hear and read of everything that has occurred through walls of old prejudice; one cause or another obstructs the truth with all, and whatever obstructs the truth, hinders each man and woman from the performance of a duty which the country needs. Ardent patriotism, moreover, can live in but few minds without expression or opportunity of manifestation. It will subside if it have nothing to do. If the war is a mere matter of gossip, it calls for no conscious exercise of patriotism, it prepares for and encourages no patriotic spirit. Hence, even associations of women, quick to feel and earnest to act, though formed with the avowed purpose only of contributing such aid of domestic

comforts as may be available for the soldiers in field and hospital, have really a value of an entirely different kind, in that they serve the purpose of keeping love of the Union alive through healthy, social contact, expression, and labor, and each must be a center of patriotic devotion, and of the dissemination of truth favorable to patriotic devotion, radiating through communities. In this light they were regarded by Washington in the Revolution. In this light they should be regarded by every patriot now.

The recent battles East and West have completely exhausted the reserved stock of the Commission, and it is found now not only impracticable to accumulate supplies, but impossible to meet even urgent demands daily made by hospitals within sight of the very dome of the Capitol, and growing out of needs, the existence of which, as has been well ascertained, casts no censure upon the faithfulness or efficiency of the surgeons in charge. Let it here be fairly understood, that the Commission did in its origin assume to itself, as its first and most important duty, never under any circumstances to be remitted, to strive by every means within its reach to secure to the soldier the full measure of whatever he was entitled to receive from the Government. In a hospital it is desirable that the patient should be dependent upon the surgeon for the supply of his wants, for whatever interferes with this dependence interferes with the surgeon's control of his patient, and whatever interferes with this control, weakens his sense or habit of responsibility. Whatever, again, lessens the dependence of the surgeon upon his superiors for the proper supply of the hospital wants, lessens their control of him, and injures the unity, and consequently the efficiency of the whole Department. The question, therefore, has often been weighed and reweighed, whether a period in the war would not arrive when it would no longer be consistent with the purpose of the Commission, in any manner, to relieve the

surgeons from an absolute dependence upon the regular sources of Government supply for anything needed for the sick and wounded soldiers under their care. Whatever is yet to be hoped of the future, however, there can be no question that such a period has not yet been reached ; nor is it likely that it will be until, at least, some very radical changes shall have been effected in the army and militia laws of the country, and a body of fully 3,000 surgeons, honest and capable, have been educated in the technicalities which are justly required to be observed for the sake of securing proper accountability. We certainly are not yet near this, notwithstanding the comprehensive views and earnest endeavors which characterize the present administration of the Medical Department. The conviction is unavoidable, that, in numberless cases, the balance of advantages to be secured, clearly justifies the demand for volunteer aid.

Hence the necessity for a carefully guarded yet elastic system of distribution, resting upon large accumulations. Such accumulations cannot be obtained, except the people shall be generally willing to forego the gratification of those impulses which allow personal and sectional feeling to narrow and determine the channels of beneficence and patriotism.

“ In view of the immensely increased worth, in the absolute saving of the lives of our soldiers, which the system of the Commission has given to the benefactions of the people, as demonstrated at Antietam, at South Mountain, at Manassas, at Cedar Mountain, at Winchester, at Malvern, at Seven Pines, at West Point, at Williamsburgh, at Corinth, at Shiloh, at Fort Donelson, at New Orleans, at Roanoke Island, at Newbern, and at Port Royal ; in view of the obvious fact that such articles as are most needed are becoming more scarce and valuable ; in view of the large force now taking the field ; and in view of the sterner spirit with which the people plainly demand that

the war shall henceforth be conducted, it is hoped that all good men and women who are not privileged to take a more active part, will lay hold here, and try to put this business everywhere, fairly and squarely on the same common ground as that of the dear cause itself for which our brothers are pouring out their blood. In union is strength. In disunion is weakness and waste. Can we not, in this trial of our nation, learn to wholly lay aside that poor disguise of narrowness of purpose and self-conceit, which takes the name of local interest and public spirit, but whose fruit is manifest in secession? Distrust of generous policies, and want of faith in principles, with an indolent dependence on leaders and parties, have been the national sins of which this war brings the plain and direct retribution. God grant us grace to turn from them. Let us remember that, while we are called to lay our household offerings upon the bloody altar of the war, we are also called to bring forth fruits meet for repentance.

The plan of the Relief Service of the Sanitary Commission, is—

1. To secure, as far as practicable, reserves of hospital and ambulance supplies, in order to be prepared to act with efficiency in emergencies.
2. To cover in its work, as far as practicable, the whole field of the war, dispensing supplies wherever most needed, to all in the service of the Union, without preference of State, arm, or rank, army or navy, volunteer or regular.
3. To study the whole field, by means of carefully selected and trained medical inspectors, in order to determine where supplies are most needed, and to watch against their misuse.

4. While administering to all pressing needs of the suffering, to carefully avoid relieving the officials in charge in any unnecessary degree from their responsibility, but to do all that is possible to secure his full rights to the soldier, unable to help himself.

5. To cordially co-operate, as far as practicable, with the hospital service of the Government, endeavoring to supplement, never to supplant it.

Societies, churches, schools, and all other organizations, the members of which cherish the principles upon which this plan is founded, are cordially invited to avail themselves of it in any action which they may see fit to take for the benefit of the sick and wounded.

1st. Contributing Aid Societies will send supplies when they see fit, through the channels established by the Commission.

2d. Corresponding Aid Societies must be devoted to the collection and preparation of supplies, to be sent to the soldier exclusively through the Commission.

3. Branch Aid Societies are chartered by the Commission, to be established at points suitable for obtaining supplies, intended for distribution by the system of the Commission, from States or large districts. They must be responsible for the necessary labor and expenses of this duty, and must account exactly and punctually to those from whom supplies are received, and to the Commission. As the Commission are trustees for the judicious distribution of the gifts of the people to the soldiers, the Branches are intermediate trustees for collecting, assorting, packing, storing, and forwarding the gifts. In emergencies, the Branch Societies are often called upon to assist the Commission even more directly in the performance of its duties.

Branches and Corresponding Societies will be supplied with the bulletins and all other publications of the Commission as soon as issued.

For further information apply to

FRED. LAW OLMSTED,

General Secretary.

Washington, October 21st, 1862.

Commissioners under appointment from the President of the United States: The Rev. Henry W. Bellows, D. D.; Prof. A. D. Bache, LL. D.; George W. Cullum, U. S. A.; Alexander E. Shiras, U. S. A.; Robert C. Wood, M. D., U. S. A.; William H. Van Buren, M. D.; Wolcott Gibbs, M. D.; Samuel G. Howe, M. D.; Cornelius R. Agnew, M. D.; Elisha Harris, M. D.; J. S. Newberry, M. D.; George T. Strong; Horace Binney, Jr.; the Right Rev. Thomas M. Clark, D. D.; the Hon. Joseph Holt; R. W. Burnett; the Hon. Mark Skinner; Frederick Law Olmsted.
